

Spotlight

By M.O.

Young Cancer Survivors Burdened by Diseases Later in Life

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After successfully battling their disease, young cancer survivors carry a permanently elevated risk for developing serious health problems in the future. A new Canadian study shows that for children who underwent cancer therapy the risk of returning to a hospital bed in the future is more than doubled regardless of the cancer type and treatment options. Indeed, at least one type of serious health problem developed in 41% of young survivors 5 years after the original cancer had been treated. Nearly 20% were afflicted with 2 and 10% with 3 ailments while only 17% of the comparison group developed any diseases that led to hospitalization.

The most commonly observed postcancer syndromes included diseases of the digestive tract, followed by neoplasms, relapse and second cancers, and, importantly for girls, problems related to pregnancy and birth. Although risk did not differ significantly by type of original diagnosis, survivors of a bone tumor or soft tissue sarcoma were at highest risk for late hospitalization compared to leukemia survivors, followed by brain tumor survivors.

The data were collected in the context of CAYACS (Childhood/Adolescent/Young Adult Cancer Survivors Research Program), a population-based, longitudinal survivor database dedicated to studies of long-term health and educational effects of childhood cancer in British Columbia. They illustrate the significant disease burden carried by these children often very early in life and underscore the need for developing preventive strategies in order to 'normalize' the life of children and young adults as much as possible after cancer treatment.